

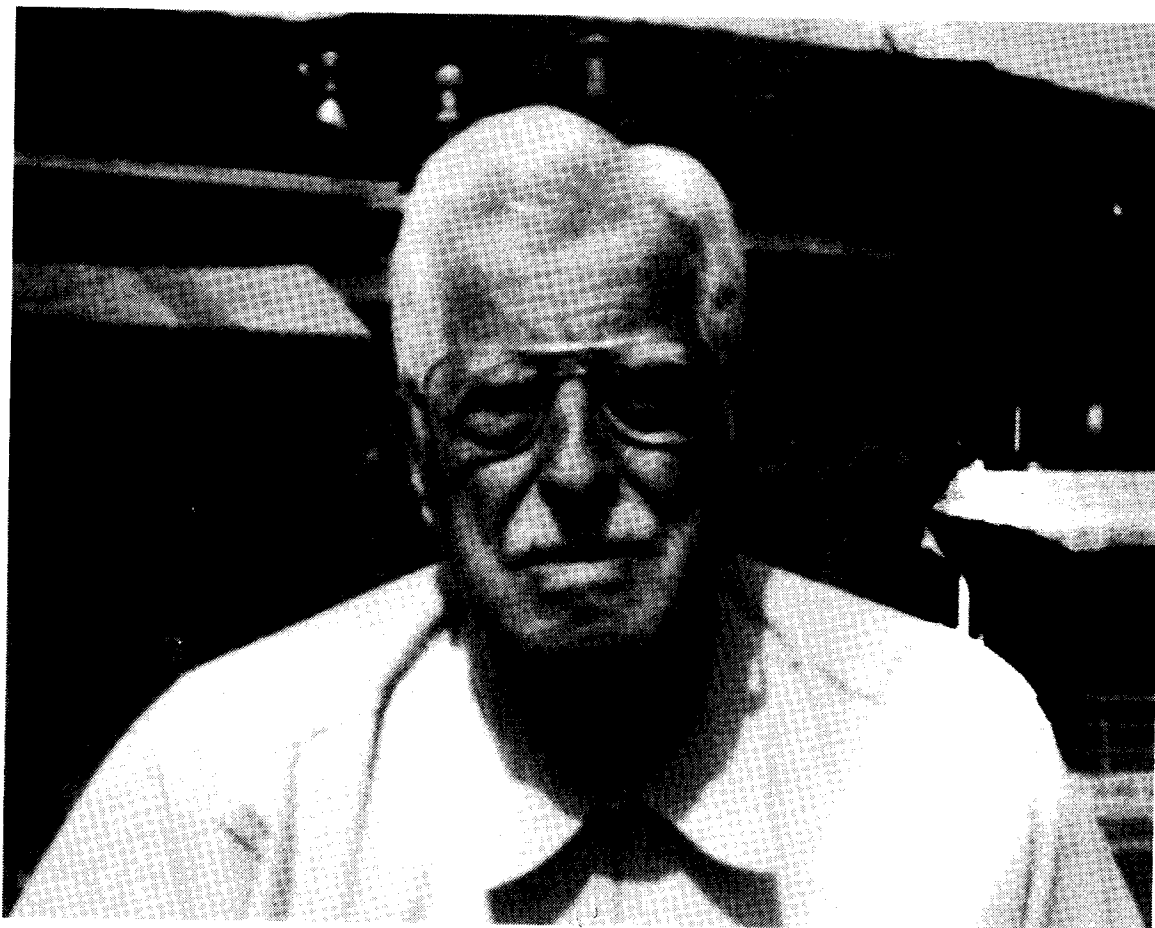
An Interview with
NORMAN E.
HANSON

An Oral History conducted and edited by
Robert D. McCracken

Nye County Town History Project
Nye County, Nevada

Tonopah
1990

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Tonopah, Nevada
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Norman Hanson
1987



Norman Hanson and the dog "Brucite" at the mining camp that later became
the town of Gabbs, Nevada
1936

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PREFACE

The Nye County Town History Project (NCTHP) engages in interviewing people who can provide firsthand descriptions of the individuals, events, and places that give history its substance. The products of this research are the tapes of the interviews and their transcriptions.

In themselves, oral history interviews are not history. However, they often contain valuable primary source material, as useful in the process of historiography as the written sources to which historians have customarily turned. Verifying the accuracy of all of the statements made in the course of an interview would require more time and money than the NCTHP's operating budget permits. The program can vouch that the statements were made, but it cannot attest that they are free of error. Accordingly, oral histories should be read with the same prudence that the reader exercises when consulting government records, newspaper accounts, diaries, and other sources of historical information.

It is the policy of the NCTHP to produce transcripts that are as close to verbatim as possible, but some alteration of the text is generally both unavoidable and desirable. When human speech is captured in print the result can be a morass of tangled syntax, false starts, and incomplete sentences, sometimes verging on incoherency. The type font contains no symbols for the physical gestures and the diverse vocal modulations that are integral parts of communication through speech. Experience shows that totally verbatim transcripts are often largely unreadable and therefore a waste of the resources expended in their production. While keeping alterations to a minimum the NCTHP will,

in preparing a text:

- a. generally delete false starts, redundancies and the uhs, ahs and other noises with which speech is often sprinkled;
- b. occasionally compress language that would be confusing to the reader in unaltered form;
- c. rarely shift a portion of a transcript to place it in its proper context;
- d. enclose in [brackets] explanatory information or words that were not uttered but have been added to render the text intelligible; and
- e. make every effort to correctly spell the names of all individuals and places, recognizing that an occasional word may be misspelled because no authoritative source on its correct spelling was found.

As project director, I would like to express my deep appreciation to those who participated in the Nye County Town History Project (NCTHP). It was an honor and a privilege to have the opportunity to obtain oral histories from so many wonderful individuals. I was welcomed into many homes--in many cases as a stranger--and was allowed to share in the recollection of local history. In a number of cases I had the opportunity to interview Nye County residents whom I have known and admired since I was a teenager; these experiences were especially gratifying. I thank the residents throughout Nye County and Nevada--too numerous to mention by name--who provided assistance, information, and photographs. They helped make the successful completion of this project possible.

Appreciation goes to Chairman Joe S. Garcia, Jr., Robert N. "Bobby" Revert, and Patricia S. Mankins, the Nye County commissioners who initiated this project. Mr. Garcia and Mr. Revert, in particular, showed deep interest and unyielding support for the project from its inception. Thanks also go to current commissioners Richard L. Carver and Barbara J. Raper, who have since joined Mr. Revert on the board and who have continued the project with enthusiastic support. Stephen T. Bradhurst, Jr., planning consultant for Nye County, gave unwavering support and advocacy of the project within Nye County and before the State of Nevada Nuclear Waste Project Office and the United States Department of Energy; both entities provided funds for this project. Thanks are also extended to Mr. Bradhurst for his advice and input regarding the conduct of the research and for constantly serving as a sounding board when methodological problems were worked out. This project would never have

become a reality without the enthusiastic support of the Nye County commissioners and Mr. Bradhurst.

Jean Charney served as administrative assistant, editor, indexer, and typist throughout the project; her services have been indispensable. Louise Terrell provided considerable assistance in transcribing many of the oral histories; Barbara Douglass also transcribed a number of interviews. Transcribing, typing, editing, and indexing were provided at various times by Jodie Hanson, Alice Levine, Mike Green, Cynthia Tremblay, and Jean Stoess. Jared Charney contributed essential word processing skills. Maire Hayes, Michelle Starika, Anita Coryell, Jodie Hanson, Michelle Welsh, Lindsay Schumacher, and Shena Salzmänn shouldered the herculean task of proofreading the oral histories. Gretchen Loeffler and Bambi McCracken assisted in numerous secretarial and clerical duties. Phillip Earl of the Nevada Historical Society contributed valuable support and criticism throughout the project, and Tom King at the Oral History Program of the University of Nevada at Reno served as a consulting oral historian. Much deserved thanks are extended to all these persons.

All material for the NCTHP was prepared with the support of the U.S. Department of Energy, Grant No. DE-FG08-89NV10820. However, any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of DOE.

--Robert D. McCracken
Tonopah, Nevada
1990

INTRODUCTION

Historians generally consider the year 1890 as the end of the American frontier. By then, most of the western United States had been settled, ranches and farms developed, communities established, and roads and railroads constructed. The mining boomtowns, based on the lure of overnight riches from newly developed lodes, were but a memory.

Although Nevada was granted statehood in 1864, examination of any map of the state from the late 1800s shows that while much of the state was mapped and its geographical features named, a vast region—stretching from Belmont south to the Las Vegas meadows, comprising most of Nye County—remained largely unsettled and unmapped. In 1890 most of southcentral Nevada remained very much a frontier, and it continued to be for at least another twenty years.

The great mining booms at Tonopah (1900), Goldfield (1902), and Rhyolite (1904) represent the last major flowering of what might be called the Old West in the United States. Consequently, southcentral Nevada, notably Nye County, remains close to the American frontier; closer, perhaps, than any other region of the American West. In a real sense, a significant part of the frontier can still be found in southcentral Nevada. It exists in the attitudes, values, lifestyles, and memories of area residents. The frontier-like character of the area also is visible in the relatively undisturbed quality of the natural environment, most of it essentially untouched by human hands.

A survey of written sources on southcentral Nevada's history reveals some material from the boomtown period from 1900 to about 1915, but very little on the area after around 1920. The volume of available sources

varies from town to town: A fair amount of literature, for instance, can be found covering Tonopah's first two decades of existence, and the town has had a newspaper continuously since its first year. In contrast, relatively little is known about the early days of Gabbs, Round Mountain, Manhattan, Beatty, Amargosa Valley, and Pahrump. Gabbs's only newspaper was published intermittently between 1974 and 1976. Round Mountain's only newspaper, the Round Mountain Nugget, was published between 1906 and 1910. Manhattan had newspaper coverage for most of the years between 1906 and 1922. Amargosa Valley has never had a newspaper; Beatty's independent paper folded in 1912. Pahrump's first newspaper did not appear until 1971. All six communities received only spotty coverage in the newspapers of other communities after their own papers folded, although Beatty was served by the Beatty Bulletin, which was published as a supplement to the Goldfield News between 1947 and 1956. Consequently, most information on the history of southcentral Nevada after 1920 is stored in the memories of individuals who are still living.

Aware of Nye County's close ties to our nation's frontier past, and recognizing that few written sources on local history are available, especially after about 1920, the Nye County Commissioners initiated the Nye County Town History Project (NCTHP). The NCTHP represents an effort to systematically collect and preserve information on the history of Nye County. The centerpiece of the NCTHP is a large set of interviews conducted with individuals who had knowledge of local history. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and then edited lightly to preserve the language and speech patterns of those interviewed. All oral history interviews have been printed on acid-free paper and bound and archived in Nye County libraries, Special Collections in the James R. Dickinson

Library at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and at other archival sites located throughout Nevada. The interviews vary in length and detail, but together they form a never-before-available composite picture of each community's life and development. The collection of interviews for each community can be compared to a bouquet: Each flower in the bouquet is unique--some are large, others are small--yet each adds to the total image. In sum, the interviews provide a composite view of community and county history, revealing the flow of life and events for a part of Nevada that has heretofore been largely neglected by historians.

Collection of the oral histories has been accompanied by the assembling of a set of photographs depicting each community's history. These pictures have been obtained from participants in the oral history interviews and other present and past Nye County residents. In all, more than 1,000 photos have been collected and carefully identified. Complete sets of the photographs have been archived along with the oral histories.

On the basis of the oral interviews as well as existing written sources, histories have been prepared for the major communities in Nye County. These histories also have been archived.

The town history project is one component of a Nye County program to determine the socioeconomic impacts of a federal proposal to build and operate a nuclear waste repository in southcentral Nye County. The repository, which would be located inside a mountain (Yucca Mountain), would be the nation's first, and possibly only, permanent disposal site for high-level radioactive waste. The Nye County Board of County Commissioners initiated the NCTHP in 1987 in order to collect information on the origin, history, traditions, and quality of life of Nye County

communities that may be impacted by a repository. If the repository is constructed, it will remain a source of interest for hundreds, possibly thousands, of years to come, and future generations will likely want to know more about the people who once resided near the site. In the event that government policy changes and a high-level nuclear waste repository is not constructed in Nye County, material compiled by the NCTHP will remain for the use and enjoyment of all.

--R.D.M.

Robert McCracken, conducting a telephone interview with Norman Hanson, who lives in Madera, California, April 29, 1990.

CHAPTER ONE

RM: Why don't we start by you giving me your name as it reads on your birth certificate?

NH: My name is Norman Ernest Hanson.

RM: And could you state your birthdate, and place of birth?

NH: Yes, sir. I was born in Green Bay, Wisconsin, August the 5th, 1893.

RM: And could you tell me your father's name, and his date and place of birth?

NH: My father's name was Ole Andreas Hanson, and he was born in Christiana (now Oslo), Norway, July 21, 1859.

RM: What was your father's occupation?

NH: He was a freight-boat captain on the Great Lakes.

RM: At what age did he emigrate from Norway?

NH: He emigrated to the U.S. at the age of 16 and died August 28, 1929.

RM: Could you tell me your mother's maiden name?

NH: Yes - Emma Mary Nebel.

RM: And when and where was she born?

NH: She was born in a place called Centerville, Wisconsin, June 26, 1866.

RM: How many brothers and sisters did you have, Norman?

NH: Five in all. One brother died before I was born, but including him, there were 4 boys and a girl.

RM: Could you state their names in terms of the oldest first?

NH: First was Walter (who died in infancy), then Ethel, who was about 2

years younger than Walter, then I, then Roy and then the youngest, Clarence.

RM: Were you raised in Green Bay?

NH: No, I was raised in Milwaukee.

RM: At what age did you move to Milwaukee?

NH: Oh, I was very young - about 5 years old.

RM: How far did you go in school, Norman?

NH: Well, I graduated from high school, and that was it.

RM: What did you do after you graduated from school?

NH: I had an apprentice course as an electrician. After completing the apprentice course I hired out as a maintenance electrician with Allis-Chalmers Company in the Mining Research Division. After about 4 years I left Allis and joined the army.

RM: And was that for World War I?

NH: That's right.

RM: Where did they send you?

NH: Well, I enlisted in the latter part of '17. My first stop in army life was at Columbus Barracks, Ohio, where I took the oath and the physical once-over, then it was on to Camp Grant, Rockford, Illinois, for 2 months' training. Then they sent me to Camp Sheridan, Montgomery, Alabama. Here, for for some reason I never could understand, I was placed on detached service and assigned with a group of corporals and a lieutenant (I was then a corporal) to conduct a trainload of draftees from Fort Slocum, New York, to Camp Hancock in Augusta, Georgia. On completion of the assignment I was transferred from army status to Chemical Warfare Service (CWS) and ordered to Edgewood Arsenal, Edgewood, Maryland, and given another stripe, making me a sergeant. We made no gas

there; our duty was to load the different projectiles with the many different gases. This meant keeping your gas mask within reach at all times. I was discharged May, 1919.

RM: What did you do then?

NH: I went back to Allis-Chalmers. On May 20th, 1922, I married Isabella Masson, who was born in Chicago, November 9th, 1892. In 1923 I accepted employment with Leathen Smith Company of Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin - owners of a shipyard and stone quarry. My duties were as an electrician in both shipyard and quarry. The Smith quarry was a high-grade dolomite in demand for road building and construction work. The quarry was purchased by Basic Magnesium in 1926, and I went along with the sale. In 1929 I was made manager of Basic's Sturgeon Bay operation, and I stayed with Basic until I retired in 1959.

RM: Now, why did Basic Magnesium buy that company?

NH: The purchase was made, I suppose, as a good business venture, since dolomite rock was in high demand for building use. Also, it was the largest stone [operation] of its type on the Great Lakes.

I was there until 1936. It must be said that Basic's western operations began in March, 1936, when Basic's Cleveland office asked me, as the Sturgeon Bay operations manager, to seek out and report on a high-grade magnesium deposit reported in a mining journal to have been discovered somewhere in Nye County, Nevada.

My first objective was the mining records in the Tonopah courthouse. There I found the owner to be Harry Springer of Mina, Nevada. After a couple of months of search and investigation I completed my report on a possible operation, based on labor (type and availability), transportation (rail and truck), source of supplies, relationship with

state and county officials and a copy of a report from the University of Nevada School of Mines, stating the ore to be of excellent quality but of limited quantity.

RM: What was your first impression of Nye County?

NH: [chuckles] You know, when I look back I think I felt like Columbus. I had never been west of the Mississippi River before. And I felt like Columbus - I knew I was going somewhere, but I didn't know [chuckles] where I was going and what I was going to do when I got there.

RM: I'll be darned. [laughs] That's good.

NH: I was raised in the pine country and the lakes of Northern Wisconsin - and to be sent out to a place like Gabbs!

RM: Isn't that something! What did you think when you first came to the Gabbs area?

NH: Huh! I was ready to give the whole works up. But I got ahold of Harry Springer in Mina and he took me out to the property. At that time it was 33 miles from Luning over a single-path road. And the road was really no road at all - a bulldozer had just run over it, you know. We went out there, and he had done some research work - core drilling and one thing and another. And there were some buildings on the property that he had brought in, apparently from some of the old mining towns in the area. There was an 8-room bunkhouse and a mess hall and little buildings for one thing and another.

RM: How many claims did Springer have?

NH: Springer's claim covered the brucite only; he had no other in the area that I know of. In my search for additional ore sources to augment our then-operation, I discovered and staked out, on Basic's behalf, several claims a short distance from the brucite operations. It was

these claims that later became the supplier of magnesite for the Gabbs Henderson wartime project.

Now, let me explain what brucite is. It's a magnesium hydroxide - $\text{Mg}(\text{OH})_2$ - and it was known to exist, but was never found in quantities big enough to exploit. This was the only deposit known that was big enough to exploit. I spent - oh, a couple of days at his property there. I slept in my car the first night. Being in strange country, I was pretty leery about . . . well, before I left, one of the engineers in the Cleveland office said, "You want to get some high boots, because the place is lousy with snakes in that area."

RM: [laughs]

NH: So that didn't help matters any. Anyway, I must've spent about 2 months in getting freight rates and conditions and this and that, and I brought my report back to Cleveland. In the latter part of August, in 1936, they called me up and said, "Well, we have [taken a] 35-year lease on this property. And now, you go out and develop it." [chuckles] And that was really a kick in the pants for two, because here I had a wife and children in Sturgeon Bay, and go out there to a desolate place like that . . .

Well anyway, I got things organized pretty well. The most essential person, of course, in any mining operation like that is the cook, and I got myself a Chinaman.

RM: Where'd you get him at?

NH: Reno. But [chuckles] I've got to tell you, the first order he put in was 100 pounds of rice.

RM: [laughs]

NH: We had pickled rice and fried rice, stewed rice . . . any way you

could work up rice, we had it. Well anyway, we got along pretty well. My first carload of ore was shipped out of there by about the first of November. Everything was going in lovely, apple-pie order, so I thought I'd better make plans to go and visit my family over the holidays. I left the foreman there in charge and I arrived home the day before Christmas.

I no sooner arrived when Cleveland called and said they'd like to have me come to [the office there] and go over some matters - the president was due to leave for Europe, and he would like me to come in to Cleveland. And then I could go back to Sturgeon Bay and spend the holidays with my family.

Well, I got to Cleveland, and about the second day I was there I got a telegram from the lady who kept the store at Luning (and she was postmaster as well as proprietor of the store), telling me that they had had an awful storm in that area, and that the camp was snowed in, and advised that I'd better come out. So I never got back home. I just took a plane and went back out.

I got the sheriff and we got a crew from the navy base at Hawthorne and we broke through, into camp, and we took some of them out. There were 8 men at camp at the time. We took out 4, and the other 4 said they would like to stay there, if they could, because they had no place to go anyway, and there was plenty of fuel and food. So we went back out with 4 and left the other 4 there.

Well, about 3 or 4 days after that, one of the fellows that we left out there came into the hotel in Mina - I was then staying at a little hotel in Mina - and said that the 4 of them had started out. They got camp fever and thought they'd better get out while the getting out was

good. They got started out and 2 of them only went about 10 miles and turned around and went back into camp. But the other 2 continued on. And this one fellow came into the hotel and reported what had happened. He said, "I left John over there," at what we called a plateau, which is about half-way into town. He said, "I left him. You better go out and get him. He's in bad shape."

So I again called the sheriff, and he said, "Well, you start out, and we'll follow behind you." So I got another fellow and started out. We only got to the top of the hill outside of Luning, when we got mired in the snow. We kept on going, and we found the other man, the lost man, lying there in the snow, frozen stiff.

RM: Oh! He was frozen!

NH: Yes, he was frozen. Well, on the way in, between Luning and where we found the man, we had passed through a sheepherder's camp. I went back to see if we couldn't get some help and I got a horse, and we went back and tried to load this frozen man on the horse. But he was just frozen stiff. We couldn't drape him over the saddle or anything, so we left him down on the ground and went back into town. On the way in we met the sheriff and here was the navy gang from the Hawthorne base. It was quite a parade. They were on bivouac, I guess. They had set up tents, and one thing and another. Anyway, they went through and went into camp and brought the other fellows out and closed the camp, and they brought the dead man in.

I notified the brother of the dead man what had happened. The brother came into the camp, and of course he did a bit of weeping, you know. He had his girlfriend with him. And, "Poor old John, he's gone," and this and that. [Then] he said, "Did my brother have any money

coming?"

I said, "Yes, he had \$75 coming."

He said, "Can I have it?"

And I said, "Yes," and I gave him his 75 bucks. And he started to liquor it up, you know. So he got pretty well oiled up.

And he had an old . . . I forget the name of the car, but it's one of those that are not made anymore. It had a flat trunk. We had brought the body out. We tried to sit him up in the seat, but we couldn't bend him, and his feet stuck out the window [lying down]. He was going to take him back, and someone said, "Well, tie him on the trunk." So we wrapped him up in burlap and tied him on the trunk and he started out.

He got as far Hawthorne, they tell me, and the sheriff stopped him there and made him put up for the night, and the next day they went on home.

The camp didn't open until the first part of February, I think - in there somewhere. And I enjoyed . . . during the time I was in the hotel, we had several [chuckles] amusing things. We were sitting in the bar room of this hotel in Mina, and the old town character, Wild Horse Dick, came in and he was pretty well oiled up. He wanted another drink and they refused to give him any. So after a lot of words and one thing and another, he left. At that time they had a railroad roundhouse in Mina. The narrow gauge would terminate there and go down into Owens Valley and another branch went from Mina into Tonopah. They were both narrow gauge. And of course the standard gauge ended there. So that was quite an active place. Old Dick was going over to the other side of the tracks, to his home, and I guess to see the girls over there. [chuckles]

Anyway, he cut through the railroad yards. And where they used to

repair the cars and the oil tanks and so forth they had a pit in the yard where they'd dump all the old oil. And of course, the zero [degree] weather thickened this oil up to a lard state. Old Dick, going through the railroad yard that night, making a short cut, fell in this pit.

CHAPTER TWO

NH: He fell in this oil. Christ, he started to scream, and the fellows working in the roundhouse there came running into the saloon and said, "Someone's in the pit."

So we all ran out there and picked old Wild Horse Dick out of this mess of lardy oils, you know. Now, what do you do with someone like that? You can't . . . [chuckles]

RM: You can't put them in a tub, can you?

NH: No. His ears were full of . . . it draped from his hair. So they took him into the boiler rooms there and undressed him and washed him down as well as they could with oils and kerosene and drove him to the doctor in Hawthorne. Old Dick almost died from the acid fumes. Then about February, the camp opened up and we went to work again.

RM: And what kind of an operation did you have, at that point?

NH: It was just an open pit, and we had one of the old dumpsters, if you know what a dumpster is.

RM: Well . . .

NH: An end-loading thing, you know.

RM: A front-end loader?

NH: Well, it's similar to it. It was an attachment onto a sort of an auto frame. Miners would collect the ore after, of course, the shooting and one thing and another, and load up the hoppers. The dumpster would take the ore up and take it over and dump it into a big hopper. From there it would slide through the hopper into the cart for loading it at Luning.

RM: Oh - you would truck it over to Luning?

NH: Right.

RM: How many men were you working at that time?

NH: At that time we were about 10 men.

RM: And they were living at the camp?

NH: That's right.

RM: Do you remember what you paid them?

NH: No, I don't. When I first went out there, someone told me, "Now, you're strange here. The labor here is more or less a rough type of labor. If you give them good bedding and good food, you will have no trouble with your labor at all." And we didn't - we had absolutely no trouble at all.

RM: Where did the men come from?

NH: Well [chuckles], they were the drifting type; they were from no set place. But we had a loading ramp at Luning, and trucks would back up under this ramp to raise it up, so that they could dump into the gondola cars. This ramp had been boarded up by the drifters; they made a kind of a shed out of it. And there was always someone there. Well, I called it the Luning "recruiting office."

RM: Oh. [chuckles]

NH: There was always someone there, you see?

But the cooks were really something. I had a more trouble with the cooks than any other part of the operation.

RM: What kind of troubles did you have?

NH: Well, drinking, mostly. I tried to keep the drinking out of camp as much as I could. I had one fellow claim he had been a cook on an ocean liner, and I guess he was, because he was good. But he was always drunk; and I could never figure out just where he was getting his liquor from.

It seemed that the drunker he got, the better he got.

RM: [laughs]

NH: When he got real tipsy, why, we got cream puffs and things like that.

RM: [laughs] That's pretty good. What happened to your Chinese cook?

NH: Well, the storm [was enough for him].

RM: Now, you were shipping the ore back to Ohio, weren't you?

NH: That's right.

RM: Whereabouts in Ohio were you shipping it?

NH: Maple Grove, Ohio - right near Sandusky.

RM: And what were they doing with the ore?

NH: They were making high-temperature brick for steel furnaces.

RM: How much were you shipping a month during this period?

NH: Oh, during that period we were shipping maybe 40 cars a month.

RM: So you were shipping a car a day out of there.

NH: Just about; yes.

RM: A car then was what, Norman - 40 tons?

NH: Yes.

RM: You were turning out quite a bit of ore, weren't you. How long did this go on, then?

NH: I stayed there until 1941.

RM: Just shipping a car a day or so?

NH: Yes. In the meantime, in working the brucite, as I told you, I located a number of claims of magnesite.

RM: Could you explain the difference between brucite and magnesite again?

NH: Well, the difference is in the grade. They're both MgO - magnesium

- but brucite is a higher grade - $\text{Mg}(\text{OH})_2$ - magnesium hydroxide, approximately 85 percent MgO , and magnesite is MgO - magnesium oxide, approximately 65 percent MgO .

RM: Where were the claims located?

NH: They were located just above the brucite, on the same plain there.

RM: Nobody else came in and located there?

NH: No. [chuckles] They were satisfied to get their brucite, I guess, and never went any further. So I located that for the company. And in 1941, I guess the government had some inkling that trouble was brewing with Japan so they came in and took the claims away from the company.

RM: What time of the year was that?

NH: I left there in May of 1941. [Basic Magnesium] sent me to Maple Grove, as manager of the plant where they made their brick.

RM: Why didn't they leave you on the site?

NH: The metal project began to formulate, and it became very much an engineering matter from that point on.

RM: What did the camp at the mine look like when you left, Norman?
Could you describe it?

NH: We had put in a bath house. We brought a water line down . . . they discovered some water about 1000 feet up the canyon and I made a concrete well where the water would collect during the day, and then we'd have enough for our campsite. We drilled wells in the valley, had a lot of water, but you couldn't use it for drinking purposes - it was high in fluorine.

RM: It was also hot, wasn't it?

NH: Yes. We had [chuckles] to have it go over coolers, to use it. Then we had a building that had been a storeroom that we used as an office.

And the back part of this building was my bedroom and one thing and another. And we had enlarged the galley - the kitchen - and enlarged the bunkhouse, and we put in showers and toilets and so forth.

RM: How many men were you working when you left?

NH: Oh, when I left, I'd say we had about 12 or 14 men.

RM: OK. The work force hadn't grown much, had it?

NH: No, it hadn't. It was all just hand labor.

RM: When you went back to Maple Grove, were they still shipping ore back to you then?

NH: Yes, the brucite operation kept on going.

RM: Was it under the control of the military?

NH: No. The brucite was separate; they never touched it. But they did start operating in one of the magnesite claims that I had made. The best claim there was one I had named after my daughter - June One. It was the one the government took over and worked.

RM: I see. But I still don't understand why they took you off of the place.

NH: Well, [the operation] got to be pretty much of an engineering outfit, as I said. But our company kept on going with the brucite. I still had charge of brucite, and would go out occasionally - I'd go back and forth.

RM: And what was the government doing with the ore magnesite?

NH: They weren't doing anything [when I left]; they were building the plant.

RM: When did they start building that plant?

NH: They started building it in the fall of 1941.

RM: Even before Pearl Harbor?

NH: Yes.

RM: So they knew it was coming, didn't they?

NH: Evidently, they must've known. And Basic had the contract to build the plant [at Gabbs] and the metal plant at Las Vegas.

RM: Were they putting in a big plant at that time?

NH: Yes, as I understand it, the plant was to meet their war needs at a cost, eventually, of \$175 million for the Basic and Henderson operations. Here again, rumor prevailed.

RM: I see. And you later bought the plant [at Gabbs] back from the government?

NH: Right.

RM: How much did you pay?

NH: Oh, I couldn't tell you. It was one of those things - I suppose 10 cents on the dollar.

RM: So after your company bought the plant back, you moved back out there?

NH: That's right.

RM: What did you think when you got back out to Gabbs in '49?

NH: Well, I would go out there occasionally on the brucite operation, so I knew what was going on; I could see the progress they were making. I know they had 1000 men there. And it was one of those war things: Get it done, get it done! Cost was no object at all.

RM: Wow. What happened to the mining operation there after they shut down Henderson?

NH: Both projects were shut down, and they sold Henderson to the state.

RM: Did they shut down the magnesite mining operation at Gabbs?

NH: Oh, no. We bought it and we operated it. We shut down the brucite

then and went into the government set-up.

RM: What happened between the end of the war and 1949?

NH: There was nothing. The government shut it down and they just had caretakers there. We were still mining brucite until we took it over - then we shut down the brucite, as I said. The brucite deposit was rapidly being depleted and was increasingly more costly in operation, and the ex-government project was then available.

RM: So you went back out there in '49. Tell me what happened to you then.

NH: Well, we took over the plant. As a matter of fact, I was in charge of the western operation. And of course, the government had [put in the utilities]. When we bought the outfit, we bought the telephone company, we bought the townsite operation, we bought the water system - the whole thing became ours. And they had a big apartment house and about 40 homes and paved streets, streetlights and a sewage system, a water system . . . I was [chuckles] president of the telephone company, president of the light company. . . . Of course, that didn't last too long, because it was all sold out. We sold the telephone company to Nevada Bell and the power system to Nevada Power. And we owned the homes, and they were a headache. We were renting them out, and the people who were renting them took no care of them. So we sold the homes off.

RM: What did you do with the water and sewer systems?

NH: We kept right on with them.

Other voice: You built a swimming pool.

NH: Yes, and the library and [facilities] for the Boy Scouts and the Girl Scouts. And they had a school there, too.

RM: Now, what were you doing with the magnesite you were mining?

NH: We shipped it back East to Ohio.

RM: What were they making out of it - more brick?

NH: Right.

RM: How many men were you working in '49?

NH: Approximately 25 in the brucite operation.

RM: How many were they working there during the war?

NH: A thousand or more during plant construction, and about 200 during operation, working 3 shifts. They were really shipping. They had a fleet of trucks that was almost a train. And the contractor that did the hauling, which was Wells Cargo, had leased the hotel at Goldfield. The truckers would leave Gabbs, take a load as far as Goldfield, and then the truckers from Las Vegas would change drivers there.

RM: How many tons did those trucks haul?

NH: Oh, hell - they were big trucks. They must've hauled 35, 40 tons.

RM: How many trucks do you think they had?

NH: I wouldn't want to guess, because I never did . . . but Joe Wells was the contractor.

RM: Who was the president of Basic Magnesium?

NH: Mr. Howard P. Eells.

RM: Did you know him?

NH: I knew him quite well, having been in Basic employment for 35 years. He was quite a guy. I thought the world of him.

RM: When did you first meet him? Tell me about that.

NH: I first met him when they took over the plant there at Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin.

RM: What kind of a guy was he?

NH: He was a well-liked person, very well known in national industry.

He came from a very wealthy family. The Eells family in Ohio owned the Bucyrus-Erie Company, which made [power] shovels and things. And old Grandfather Eells built the Nickel Plate Railroad.

RM: Where did they live?

NH: The old grandfather lived in Shaker Heights, Ohio.

RM: Describe what Howard Eells looked like.

NH: He was a big, heavyset fellow, about my height. I think probably he weighed about - oh, 240 - somewhere in through there. And he had a voice like a foghorn.

RM: How tall are you?

NH: Six foot two.

RM: Was he a good man to do business with?

NH: Very, as far as I know. And he was well-organized; he must have been.

RM: Do you remember Senator Berkeley Bunker - from Nevada?

NH: I heard much of him, but never did meet him.

RM: He contended that there was magnesite closer to Las Vegas, and that the deal in Gabbs was political - a sweetheart deal. Have you ever heard that?

NH: No, I didn't hear that, but if he said it was closer, I wonder where it was, because I know of nothing in that area. I know Kaiser tried to get in there - his holdings were all in California. He's the only one that I know of who was interested. Well, in a way I think it was a little political.

RM: It was?

NH: It well could have been political. Howard Eells was a well-known Ohio Republican, a friend of the Taft family, while Bunker, a Democrat

and friend of Truman, might well have created a situation on a par with the 2-party acts we find in Congress today.

RM: But there was no magnesite in the vicinity of Las Vegas that was closer than Gabbs, to your knowledge?

NH: I never heard of any and I haven't heard of any since.

RM: Magnesite is kind of rare, isn't it?

NH: Yes, it is - a good quality magnesite is.

RM: What are the geological conditions that magnesite occurs under?

NH: I don't know. But the formation of brucite is still of much interest because of its deposit locations. It is the opinion of the best authorities that brucite was formed by the hot magmatic waters, ages ago, percolating up through the magnesite rock, leaching out the soluble magnesia crystals. This slurry then flowed into a bowl or depression forming a pond, as in our case. Evaporation through the ages left the solid rock, resulting in magnesium hydroxide - $Mg(OH)_2$. This material has a limited medicinal value, as in Philips Milk of Magnesia.

CHAPTER THREE

RM: Norman, when you got back to Gabbs in 1949, did you bring your family with you that time?

NH: No. When I first went West in 1936 my family moved West in 1937, locating in southern California - Brea, California - just east of Los Angeles. In 1941 my family came with me in my transfer to Maple Grove, Ohio. Then in 1949 they joined me in the rejuvenated Gabbs.

RM: When you were out in Gabbs in the '30s, was it tough on you, being away from your family like that?

NH: Oh, very tough. Yes, because the children were small. But I had a wonderful wife, and she took it in stride.

RM: Did you get to see them much?

NH: I'd spend a couple of days a month down in Brea in the late '30s.

RM: How did you get down to Brea?

NH: We'd drive down through the Owens Valley.

RM: Well, what did you find when you arrived back in Gabbs in 1949, as the plant manager?

NH: I was, of course, astonished by what had taken place, although I had seen the work in progress. And the government's expenditure and things. Talk about being loose with their money! The inventories that they had in stock . . . if they needed one thing, why, there'd be 4 or 5 dozen. Also, when I went back, I got mixed up quite a bit in politics.

RM: That's what your daughter said. She said you were a Nye County assemblyman.

NH: Yes. I'll tell you why I went [to the assembly]. After things were going along pretty well, Mr. Eells said to me, "I'd rather that you turn

the plant over in an advisory capacity to the assistant manager. I would like to have you get into public relations - particularly in political [matters]." He said, "We need a little political setup, here."

RM: How did you get involved in politics?

NH: We were regulated by the board of supervisors in Tonopah, 110 miles away. We had no government control over our own property. So it was suggested that I try to run for the state assembly and incorporate Gabbs. I was elected and the first thing I did was present a bill, incorporating Gabbs, never thinking that would go through, because [of] the opposition in Tonopah. But the opposition didn't amount to anything, because [the people in the assembly] were all with me - they could see how Tonopah was running things. It was doing all the governing itself. So Gabbs was the only incorporated town in Nye County, and maybe it is yet.

RM: It still is. The assemblyman represented Nye County at that time, didn't he?

NH: There were 2 assemblymen in each county at that time.

RM: Was it hard for you to get elected? I mean, you weren't that well known in Nye County.

NH: Except for Tonopah, I had little opposition. Beatty and Pahrump were my strongest boosters.

RM: What platform did you run on?

NH: Republican. Talking about "platforms," when I first came out there a fellow said to me, "What's your political party?"

I says, "Nonpartisan," which it was - Nonpartisan [was a party] in Wisconsin.

And he says, "Nonpartisan? I never heard of that. Out here, we're all Democrats. And be damn sure," he said [chuckles], "that you don't

vote Republican."

RM: [laughs] But you ran as a Republican?

NH: Yes. I had no trouble. I ran with Charlie Russell, who was also a Republican.

RM: But you weren't that well known in Nye County, were you?

NH: Oh, I was into all kinds of things. I was chairman of the Crusade for Freedom for Nevada, which consisted of one [delegate] from every state in the union. I was sent to Europe to show what I was working on. I'd been any number of things. I was on the governor's advisory board for 4 years . . .

RM: Did you campaign in Beatty and places like that?

NH: I did very little campaigning.

RM: How did you feel about serving in the state legislature?

NH: Very fine. I would've stayed in Nevada if I hadn't been . . . my girls were all on this side of the hill, and my wife said, "As long as you can move anywhere you want, why not go where the girls are?"

RM: So that's where you live now?

NH: Yes. We moved over here, and have been over here ever since. But when I look back, I should've stayed in Nevada. Because, really, it's the nicest place in the Union.

RM: How many children did you and your wife have?

NH: Three daughters.

RM: Could you list their names, and when they were born?

NH: June was born June 9, 1924. My daughter Charlotte was born February 28th, 1927. And Virginia was born November 29, 1932. There were no boys; I acquired boys.

RM: [chuckles] OK, you went into politics, and how many years did you

serve in the state legislature?

NH: That's all - just the one term - 2 years. That was all I intended to serve.

RM: Yes - you mainly ran just to get Gabbs incorporated, didn't you?

NH: Right.

RM: Did you run into any opposition in getting Gabbs incorporated?

NH: None at all. I was surprised. I had opposition from the other [Nye County] legislator and one or two more, but that's all - it was overwhelming.

RM: People didn't think that Gabbs was too small to incorporate?

NH: No, there was no question about that at all.

RM: What other kinds of activities were you involved in in Nevada, Norman?

NH: One funny thing - I got a letter from the sheriff of Nye County, Bill Thomas. He was quite a boy. I got a letter from him that said, "I want you in Tonopah at your earliest convenience."

So I wondered, "Just what the hell have I done here?"

I went [to Tonopah] the next day, and went into Bill's office, and he said, "Come with me." He took me into the clerk's office, and he said, "Swear this man in as deputy sheriff." He said, "I'm not going to travel 110 miles every time some guy gets drunk at Gabbs." [chuckles] So I was deputy sheriff.

RM: What kinds of duties did you have?

NH: I was supposed to keep the law and order. But everything was all right. Except one . . . I had a little shuffle one time. I had a cook that I got in a hurry, from Reno. From his first meal, I could see he knew as much about cooking as I knew about aviation. So I fired him.

Two or 3 days later, I went into a restaurant in Mina, and in came my cook - pretty well oiled up, you know. The place was pretty well filled with people, and he proceeded to tell the folks what a so-and-so I was - and in 4-letter words, too. I tried to quiet him down, but he wasn't quiet, so I grabbed the guy and took him into the jail across the road. It was just a shack, with an iron tank inside of the place. I threw him in there and went back to the restaurant.

I hadn't been in there very long when the fire whistle blew. We all, of course, run out, and here smoke was coming out of the jail. It took us quite a while to break into this jail because of the smoke. We got in there all right, and here was the fellow, dead as a mackerel, lying on the floor. He had taken the mattress and so forth and set it afire. In the confusion, I guess, he thought he'd get out. So I went back to the camp to see who to notify in case of accident. And "In case of accident [who] to notify," he had put, "Undertaker."

RM: I'll be darned.

NH: So the county buried him right there in Mina.

RM: Do you have any more stories to tell?

NH: Oh, I've just got all kinds of them. During the dust storms in Oklahoma, in 1937, when the folks all migrated West, a man and a woman came through, and they had their entire possessions on their pickup truck. I hired them and I put him up on the hill and her in the cookhouse as a cook's aide. Everything was going along pretty well, and I let the cook go for some reason, and I made a cook out of her. And I went down to the "recruiting station" and got a big Swede as a dishwasher and swamper in the bunkhouse. Well, it wasn't very long after that when the swamper ran away with the cook.

RM: [laughs]

NH: He took the pickup that they had, and everything they had.

[chuckles] They left during the day. When this fellow came down out of the mine, he found his wife had gone. For about a week there, all I found was him sobbing, so I had to let him go.

He went back to Oklahoma, and several months later he came back from Oklahoma and went back to work in Gabbs and raised a family there.

RM: Is that right. Did he have a new girl?

NH: Yes - he had a new wife.

RM: When did the fire incident happen?

NH: Oh, that was in the early part - in the '30s.

RM: When did Bill Thomas make you deputy sheriff?

NH: That was about '37, '38.

RM: How much do you know about Bill Thomas, Norman?

NH: Oh, he was a grand old man. He was a big, rawboned fellow, very good-natured. And he never carried a gun.

RM: Was he as tall as you?

NH: Oh yes, he was a tall guy.

RM: He was taller?

NH: Yes, and rawboned. A typical western sheriff.

RM: Do you have any other stories about Bill Thomas?

NH: No, I don't know too many about Bill Thomas. But I know that from my association with him, I can certainly say he was a grand old man. And old Bill was always elected. He was never opposed. During tax time [he was also the county assessor], Bill would notify the farmers that he was coming on his tax tour, and they'd move their cattle over into another county, till Bill came through. [chuckles]

RM: Now, you became manager of western operations in 1949. When did you serve your term in the legislature?

NH: Oh, in '56 or '57. I retired in '59.

RM: What kinds of problems did you face in being the manager of western operations for Basic?

NH: I had no trouble at all. Maybe I was easygoing or they were afraid of me [chuckles], because I was pretty rawboned at that time myself. I was 6'2" and I weighed about 195.

RM: So nobody gave you trouble, then?

NH: No, no one gave me any trouble.

RM: How many tons a day were you mining during that period, roughly?

NH: We would mine roughly 2 gondolas a day.

RM: That'd be about - what - 80 tons?

NH: Roughly, yes.

RM: And how many men were you working?

NH: Oh . . . we probably fed - it was probably about 50 men on 2 shifts.

RM: And the ore was still going back to Maple Grove?

NH: Well, then we would process some of it right there at Gabbs and they'd peddle it out on the West Coast.

RM: What would they use it for on the West Coast?

NH: Oh, you've got me there.

RM: They weren't using it for firebrick, though?

NH: Oh, no. Because they had to be processed. I guess they were peddling some of it to some of the other brick companies.

RM: Could you describe what community life was like during this period?

NH: It went very, very well. We had a high school and a grade school.

And a road was built between Gabbs Valley and Ione Valley that made a

distance between the 2 of about 20 miles. And the Indians from Ione Valley, of course, came to our school - they were subsidized. We had our baseball team, and I brought in the old theater building from the army base at Tonopah. It was a big thing, you know, where they used to show the movies.

RM: What did you use it for in Gabbs?

NH: Well, we started pictures there, but it didn't work out too well. But the Masons met there, and we'd have [various] little functions, you know.

RM: I see. Why didn't the pictures work out?

NH: People didn't patronize it too well. But I put in a big swimming pool. We had a very nice volunteer fire department.

RM: What did people do for health care?

NH: Our purchase of the plant and townsite included a one-bed, well equipped emergency hospital, but we had no doctor. But a health unit was very much needed in an isolated area such as Gabbs (it was 40 miles to the nearest medical help). In my search for a doctor, I found none willing to isolate themselves in a place such as Gabbs. Luckily, I was referred to a doctor from Washington, D.C., who was in Nevada for a divorce. He got his divorce and he quickly fell in love with the state, and wanted to stay. Well, he couldn't very well get a license to practice. Apparently under the state law, he would have to be a resident for a year before he could apply for a license as a doctor. I was in the legislature then, and because we did need a doctor, the legislature, at the request of the Nevada Medical Board, allowed him a one-year temporary license with a few limitations.

I went to Washington on some government matter, and I told him I was

going to Washington. He said, "Gee, I wish you could call my folks, and tell them how I'm doing."

So I got to Washington and I called his folks. And his mother said, "Mr. Hanson, you stay right where you are and I'll come down and get you." She came down and picked me up and took me out to their place and I stayed there that day and that night - it was very fine."

CHAPTER FOUR

RM: Why didn't Howard Eells buy the plant at Henderson from the government?

NH: He had no reason to have that; it didn't fit into our operation. Besides, we were making the magnesium oxide right there at Gabbs, and transporting it to Las Vegas to make the metal, you see. We had no use for the metal, so we wouldn't have any use for the . . .

RM: So you made the oxide, and then the oxide was trucked down to Henderson?

NH: That's right. And the state bought the Henderson plant. Then they sold it to the various . . .

RM: So you stayed in Gabbs until 1959. Then what did you do?

NH: I just retired.

RM: Did you retire because you'd been with the company so long, or what?

NH: Well, yes, I did. Mr. Eells happened to be out there, and I said to him, "Mr. Eells, I think I'm going to retire. I've put enough time in here."

And he said, "I don't see why you want to retire. You're still young."

I said, "Yes, I know. But I think that that's the time to retire; maybe I can enjoy myself a little bit."

"Well," he said, "I don't like to have you do it, but if that's your choice . . . "

Well, he wouldn't let me retire until he put me into the hospital. I was in the hospital for 3 days for a full checkup from one end to the other before [chuckles] he'd let me retire. He wanted to make sure that

I was OK before retiring. They certainly were fine people. The funny part [was that] Mr. Eells had 3 daughters and no sons, and I had 3 daughters and no sons. And the chief engineer, Walter Patnoe, also had 3 daughters and no sons. Walter Patnoe was the chief engineer of the operation. As chief engineer of Basic, Patnoe was the first man from the Cleveland office to meet with federal men in the West regarding the projected magnesia metals project.

RM: I see. Was the mine still going when you retired?

NH: Oh, yes. The mine kept on going until they eventually ran into hard times. The hard times were [due to] the Japanese setup. The Japanese have taken the steel market, and even today, although our steel operation has increased some, I don't think it's over a quarter of what it used to be. It played hell with us. The steel plants were our customers.

RM: Oh, sure - for the brick. What eventually happened to Basic Magnesium?

NH: It was taken over by Combustion Engineering about 8 years ago.

RM: What happened to the Eells family?

NH: Mr. Eells died about 5 years ago.

RM: So he lived to an old age, too, didn't he?

NH: Yes. I'd say he was a year older than I.

RM: Did the Eells family own Basic Magnesium?

NH: No. It was a privately owned plant for a while, but it went public some 40 years ago.

RM: But then they sold out to Combustion Engineering. What kind of business was Combustion Engineering in?

NH: Well, Combustion Engineering was an environmental outfit that worked on smoke hazards. They control it, or eliminate it as much as they can.

They're the leading outfit in the country in that particular . . .

RM: Do they still own Basic Magnesium?

NH: As far as I know, they do.

RM: When you look on your career in Gabbs (because you basically founded the town) what do you think?

NH: I had hopes it would continue as the place it was when I left. I didn't think that it would get down to where it is today. I always had faith in the operation. Under the good management of Mr. Eells . . .

RM: How do you see the future of the industry?

NH: Well, I think there's a future if you can [make] some kind of a deal with the reciprocal trade agreements. For instance, the Japanese have hogged most of it now. [Look at] what's happened to the automobile industry - what's happened to any of them.

RM: Where do the Japanese get their magnesite?

NH: Oh, you've got me on that. I know they've revolutionized the iron industry. You used to have your coke ovens and this and that, and all your smelting today is done by electric furnaces. In the old days, they would build up a mass of metal, but today it's little patches, by electric furnaces. That's cut down a bit on the basic brick - although they have raised the temperatures, so that the brick that they make today is twice as heat resistant as it was 10 years ago. They've raised the temperature today to 3200 [degrees].

RM: What was it before?

NH: If my memory serves me right, it ranged from 2200 to 2500.

RM: There was another company mining up there, too, wasn't there - besides Basic Magnesium?

NH: Well, yes - there was Standard Slag.

RM: Tell me about that.

NH: I can't tell you too much about it. Standard Slag was a Pennsylvania outfit. They had a little bit of magnesite in there, but they never did too much with it.

RM: Where did they get their claims?

NH: From an old fellow named Albert Brown. When I first went in there in 1936, Albert Brown had a little shack up in one of the canyons. He had some magnesium claims there he sold to Standard Slag. But Standard Slag never did too much with it.

RM: They weren't a big operation, then?

NH: No.

RM: When were they in there?

NH: Oh, they were in there before we came in.

RM: Why weren't they on Harry Springer's claims?

NH: Only the Lord can answer that, I guess.

RM: And why didn't they stake out more claims, I wonder.

NH: I wouldn't know that. Old Albert Brown just had this one claim and he sold it to Standard Slag. They gave him enough money to retire on, and the last I saw of old Albert he was about 80 years old, and that was way back in the 1950s. He was living the life of Riley. He was strutting around Mina, always with a cigar in his mouth. [chuckles]

RM: [chuckles] Whatever happened to Harry Springer?

NH: During the war, he bought into a gambling setup in Hawthorne. He had his gambling outfit and he died of tuberculosis. I guess he had a little mining trouble in his lungs.

RM: Oh - maybe he had silicosis?

NH: I think so. He was a nice sort of a guy.

RM: How old a man was he when you arrived on the scene there?

NH: Oh, he was maybe 5 or 6 years younger than I.

RM: What was happening over at Ione when you arrived on the scene?

NH: There was very little activity in Ione Valley in 1937, my first visit. There was evidence, however, of such movement 50 or 60 years previous. For instance, the old Berlin mine structures were still standing.

The number of vacant buildings showed evidence of better days. The scene of all activity social and otherwise was the village pub. There seemed to be no lack of patronage each time I visited there. One striking building was the so-called Stockade, of stone construction, approximately 25-by-25 and 10 feet high, with one door entrance but minus windows or roof. I happened into the bar, and I inquired about the building across the road. A man said, "That's our jail."

I said, "That's a funny jail."

"Well," he said, "it fits our needs just right. When they get too rambunctious, too drunk, we throw them in there. When they get sober enough to climb over the top, why, we let them go."

RM: [chuckles] How about that!

NH: Of much importance to the Ione Valley is the fossil ichthyosaur (prehistoric fish). They found the fossil about a mile or so from Berlin, right on top of a hill. The professor who discovered the thing would come down into Gabbs, and I got pretty well acquainted with him. While in Carson City I introduced a bill making the site a state park, and I was made chairman of the Ichthyosaur State Park. It has since become quite a tourist attraction.

RM: I'll be darned.

NH: It's quite an outfit [now], but it was nothing when I was there. It was just a display and you could see the bones.

RM: What else was happening at Ione at that time?

NH: I don't know.

RM: Were there any Indians in the area that you knew?

NH: I knew a lot of Indians around our place. I never will forget - they asked me to give a little lecture to the classes at the high school. They got them all together in the big auditorium, and I lectured them on what we were doing and the prospects of increasing [production] and what our product was worth.

And one little boy asked me - if I were looking for arrowheads, where would I find any? "Well," I said, "I don't know; I'm not much on Indian lore, but if I were looking for arrowheads, I think I'd look near some spring, because that's where they probably would congregate. Any mementoes that you might find would be around a spring."

And a little fellow got up and said, "Mr. Hanson, you know, Johnny and I went out looking for arrowheads down this road here. We were down there quite a ways, and you know what we found?"

I said, "No."

He said, "Nothing but rock." [laughter] He said, "Mr. Hanson, was you here before the Indians?"

RM: [laughs] Were there any other mining operations in the area at this time?

NH: Yes, a fellow named Lee Dougan had found some tungsten in the side of the hill on the side of Gabbs Valley itself, over in one of the old mining towns - the Illinois Mine. He only employed 3 or 4 men, but he did very well.

RM: When was this - in the '50s?

NH: Oh, it was after the war - '49 or '50. He operated there for about 4 or 5 years. He had a little processing plant; he did very well. And there was the Stokes Mine - an iron mine. It was over in Gabbs Valley, up above us to the east. That was operated by Standard Slag.

RM: Where were they shipping their ore?

NH: Japan.

RM: Was it a big operation?

NH: No, but there was a steady flow of material. And part of it was pretty good ore.

RM: Was there any gold prospecting or anything?

NH: No; I wish we had known [chuckles] what was there, the way they're going after it now. They tell me, anyway; I haven't been over there for quite some time. I certainly would enjoy going over, because my days are gone as far as traveling.

RM: Well, Round Mountain is producing 400,000 ounces of gold this year.

NH: That's what I understand. Of course, I understand that they're running into trouble in leaching. The environmentalists claim that the acid that they're using is contaminating the ground.

RM: The cyanide, you mean?

NH: Yes.

RM: I don't know. You can neutralize cyanide with Clorox; that's what they say.

Did you have any contact with ranchers in the area?

NH: No, I didn't. When I first went in there, in 1936, there was a lot of wildlife. There used to be badgers in there, and we had skunk and a lot of coyotes. I was running down the road - that road I was telling

you about from Luning to the camp. It was just ruts, you might say. The bulldozers would go through and throw the dirt up on the side, so the road itself would mainly be - oh, maybe 2 feet, in some places 3 feet above the roadbed itself. I was going into town one day in the car, and a coyote happened to be in the rut. I sped up to see if I could catch the coyote. And by gosh, I didn't mean to kill the thing. I ran faster than he did.

RM: He couldn't jump out?

NH: Yes - he couldn't jump out. It was too close, you know.

RM: What did you do after you retired in '59?

NH: I did a lot of traveling.

RM: Where did you move after you left Gabbs?

NH: I moved to San Jose. I did a lot of [public service] work with the Volunteer Bureau, a United Fund agency, and was editor of their San Jose Social Services paper. But not for very long, because I had no pay, and whenever there was a meeting or anything, I was called on to be there and make notes to build up a little story. And being out all day, at times even Saturday and Sunday, meant leaving my wife all alone. That didn't last very long.

RM: How long did you live in San Jose, then?

NH: We lived there until 5 years ago, when we moved here with my daughter. My wife died 4 years ago this month. She was 93.

RM: What do you attribute your healthy condition to?

NH: Well, you've got me; because I lived an awful rough life.

RM: Your wife lived a long time, too, Norman. That's a remarkable thing.

NH: Yes. So I guess roughness doesn't hinder . . .

RM: [chuckles] I guess not; maybe that helps.

POSTSCRIPT

Except for the disastrous winter of 1936, Basic's first years of operation (1936 to 1941) were excellent. The annoying cook problem was solved when, in 1940, I hired 2 elderly homemaker type ladies to take over the dining operation. Their first move was to install curtains on all windows and tablecloths and put napkins and vases with artificial flowers on the tables. The mess hall became the dining room. Spuds and java became potatoes and coffee. The breakfast greeting of, "Good morning, boys," was answered with, "And a very good morning to you, Ma'am." Two roses in a garden of weeds, they were ruling the kitchen when I left in 1941.

Bob, I can hear you say, "Just how did that guy get those positions with his little or no schooling?" Well, Bob, it wasn't easy. I guess one could apply that old maxim, "They said it couldn't be done, so I done it." Always being away from top management contact - 500 miles at the Sturgeon Bay project and 2500 miles on the western job - meant using one's head (and be sure you're right!) in making important quick decisions. And, too, the isolation meant that I acquired a working knowledge of those duties inherent in such an operation - i.e., cooking, typing, drafting, surveying and etc. come easy when one has to do them.

You may also wonder just how I ranked membership in the National River and Harbors Committee. That came about through my work with the U.S. Army Engineers in Sturgeon Bay Harbor dredging while president of

the city council (and this came about while I was the Basic quarry manager). The old maxim applied here. In May 1956, I was asked to attend the President's Conference on Industrial Safety in Washington, D.C. Old Ike himself [President Dwight D. Eisenhower] attended.

You also no doubt ask, and rightly so, how I claim mining engineer status without the scholastic background. Let me explain. In April 1952, I was elected a member of the American Institute of Mining and Metallurgical Engineers, with the statement from the board of the institute that my work in the field has demonstrated all the qualifications required for membership. I cherish that document. Looking at it as it hangs on the wall before me brings to mind those wonderful years with Howard P. Eells. What were bumps and hard knocks then are cherished memories today.

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